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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5766
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
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RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 6840
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¶1. (U) Below is a compilation of political highlights from Embassy New Delhi for August 26-29, 2008, that did not feature in our other reporting, including:

-- Bihar Floods a "National Calamity"
-- Parliament to Convene October 17
-- Congress-SP Alliance Takes Shape in U.P.
-- India to Expand Ministry of External Affairs
-- Life Sentences for Four in the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots
-- Feds Investigate Court Bribery Case in Punjab

Bihar Floods a "National Calamity"

¶2. (U) Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Chairperson Sonia Gandhi and several ministers surveyed flood-affected areas on August 27. PM Singh described the situation as a "national calamity" and promised USD 23 million in federal disaster relief. He also announced that a high-level committee would meet with Nepalese government officials next week to discuss flood control measures and that the UPA federal government would dedicate additional resources to evacuate flood victims spread over 15 districts.

¶3. (U) Severe flooding in the rural Bihar has displaced nearly two million people and destroyed more than 225,000 homes after the Kosi River breached an embankment in Nepal one week ago. The death toll in the state has been difficult to determine. Bihar emergency management officials reported 10 deaths on August 27, but Indian press reported as many as ¶55. According to UNICEF India, the water flowing from the embankment caused the Kosi River to switch direction, creating a new channel about 75 miles east of its river bed and causing floods in areas unaccustomed to high water levels. As of August 28 state authorities have set-up 95 relief shelters and 44 healthcare camps. The Indian Army deployed more than 400 troops to assist with rescue operations, dispatching twenty rescue boats and air-dropping thousands of emergency supplies and food packets.

¶4. (U) With the help of the Nepalese government, the

federal and state governments hope to complete repairs to the river embankment this week but may face further delay due to heavy rains. The state government has been heavily criticized for "failing on all fronts," including maintenance of river embankment and relief/rescue operations.

BJP, Left Criticize Parliament Schedule

¶5. (U) On August 27, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government announced that the Parliament will convene for one month starting October 17 - November 21 (reftel). The session would take the place of the monsoon session which traditionally starts in August, and the winter session which takes place in December. The Bharatiya Janata Party and the CPI (M) criticized the UPA's decision to meld two sessions into one, accusing the UPA of attempting to "buy time" before general elections next year. They also attacked the UPA for failing to control spiraling commodity prices and for not addressing intensifying violence in Jammu and Kashmir.

Congress-SP Alliance Takes Shape in U.P.

¶6. (U) Congress Party and Samajawadi Party leaders will meet in New Delhi August 30-31 to discuss seat distribution ahead of parliamentary elections due by May 2009. On August 28 in Allahabad, All India Congress Committee (AICC) General Secretary Digvijay Singh said that the Congress Party would make a pitch for 20-25 seats, and the remainder would be left

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to the Samajwadi Party (SP). He also suggested that the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) may join the Congress-SP alliance to counter the challenge posed by Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) Chief Minister Mayawati. The Congress-SP alliance was forged in July when SP Chief Mulayam Singh Yadav supported the UPA government in the U.S.-India Nuclear Initiative and confidence vote.

India to Expand Ministry of External Affairs

¶7. (U) The GOI will create 139 new officer-level posts and 110 support staff posts in the Ministry of External Affairs, which currently has only about 600 officers staffing the ministry and over 160 missions worldwide. Minister of Information and Broadcasting Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi announced the decision after a Union Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The Cabinet also cleared the creation of 514 posts in the ministry over the next 10 years. MEA has been chronically short-staffed and over-worked. As a growing regional and global power, India's MEA will likely need even more positions than have been allocated to it in order to maintain the quality and range of its diplomatic interactions in Delhi and overseas. Nevertheless, this effort, even if it is modest, will ease the pressure on officers in some MEA offices and Embassies. More importantly, it is a signal that policymakers recognize that understaffing poses a serious problem for the Indian Foreign Service.

Life Sentences for Four in the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots

¶8. (U) In a landmark decision, the Delhi High Court sentenced four persons to life in prison and a fine for burning alive two Sikhs during the 1984 communal riots in New Delhi. These are the first convictions in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in which upwards of 3,500 Sikhs were killed in retaliation for Indira Gandhi's assassination by her two Sikh bodyguards. The four individuals were previously acquitted 18 years ago in a trial court because the witnesses were "inconsistent and unreliable." Releasing the Delhi High Court's verdict on August 27, Justice S.L. Bhayana explained that, "It is not a routine case of murder, loot and burning.

In this case, members of a particular community were singled out, burned alive and their properties looted. (This) sentence should be a deterrent in order to send a message." The High Court admonished the previous decision of the trial court stating that there was, "no inconsistency, only slight variation in the testimonies of the eyewitnesses. The testimony of the witnesses is trustworthy, we cannot disregard it."

¶9. (U) Mr. Tarlochan Singh, a Member of Parliament and former Chairperson of the National Commission for Minorities, welcomed the verdict but asserted that, "while this move is positive, the Sikhs are not (only) interested in punishing the ones who committed the crime. It's imperative that Congress leaders like Jagdish Tytler, Sajjan Kumar and Kamal Nath, the instigators and motivators of violence and crime, should be punished." He also added that the cases were becoming too old and witnesses had either died or moved. He underscored the importance of the Congress Party offering a formal apology to the Sikhs in India.

¶10. (SBU) Comment: These prison sentences represent a positive development in what has been an ugly story of Congress Party involvement and stone-walling in one of the most shameful episodes in its history. But, the conviction also highlights the fact that there are hundreds of other 1984 anti-Sikh riots cases that still languish in the courts.

The victims complain with some justification when they say justice delayed is justice denied and wonder if those who instigated the violence will ever face punishment in their

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lifetimes. End Comment.

Feds Investigates Court Bribery Case in Punjab

¶11. (U) A three-member Supreme Court panel transferred the corruption case involving former Haryana Additional Advocate General Sanjeev Bansal from Chandigarh police to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The federal investigation stems from the August 13 incident when a clerk of Advocate General Bansal had "mistakenly delivered" USD 35,000 to the residence of Punjab and Haryana High Court Justice Nirmaljit Kaur, who called the Chandigarh police. The money reportedly was intended for a different judge, Nirmal Yadav, who is also under investigation and went on leave shortly after the scandal surfaced.

¶12. (U) According to press, this is the first time in recent history that an independent judiciary committee has been called to probe the role of High Court Judges in a corruption case. The upper tiers of the judiciary have had a clean reputation, but the corruption culture may be starting to make inroads into even this bastion.

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